

BOOK REVIEWS

HARRISON, HENRIETTA. *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 276 pp. \$58.50 (cloth) \$24.26 (paper).

This unique book is at once a work of local and global history. It centers somewhat loosely on Cave Gully, a Catholic village in rural Shanxi, but it is more properly a study of much broader forces: three centuries of missionary endeavor in China, the transformation of local society, imperialism and fascism, and daily life under three iterations of the Chinese state. The narrative moves freely across different perspectives, following its protagonists from the hills of Shanxi to the trading houses of Beijing, or the seminaries of Naples. The ease with which the book navigates this journey reflects the breadth of the author's research. Harrison combines traditional Sinological sources, some (although we never know how much) of her own field research, and missionary letters and writings. She makes particularly extensive and effective use of Catholic records, such as the archives of the Propaganda Fide, a source that is often overlooked by historians of the twentieth century.

Much of the information presented here is indeed new, particularly as concerns the details of Catholicism in Shanxi, and the operation of these particular missions (mostly Italian Franciscans) in China. Many of the individuals described have never before appeared in Anglophone historiography. Yet as with any case study, this close focus does beg the question of what is new, and whether this particular story is simply another iteration of events that are already relatively well known.

Harrison begins by making clear that her focus on the village of Cave Gully is not cosmetic, but rather that the difference in scale is intended to produce one of substance. The village-level view allows the book to take in a longer time span, one in which individual missionaries, officials or even traumatic events such as the Boxer violence come and go both as historical moments, and as part of an evolving world of memory and identity. More importantly, the village view has the potential to reverse conventional understanding of global processes. The book's introduction and conclusion speak most eloquently about acculturation, the process by which mission Christianity becomes a genuinely native religion, but other networks of thought and power are also woven through the text.

The content of the book is centered loosely around a series of vignettes. Each chapter is prefaced by a story, ranging in type from oral history to folktale. The first of these is a rather straightforward account of the founding of the village during the early Qing. Later chapters include tales of a wolf that accompanied a missionary on his journey through the desert, of a Chinese priest who travelled to Rome to petition the pope for redress, of radiant spirits who saved the village from the wrath of the Boxers, of a disgruntled missionary who drew down a curse as he shook the dust of the village from his feet, and of a woman who was saved from a Cultural Revolution persecution by a man on a flying bicycle (finally, a *fei ge* that lives up to the name!).

Each of these stories is meant to speak to deeper issues. The question of which surname founded the village leads into a discussion of origins, and thus of the arrival of Catholicism via

Shanxi merchants in Beijing, where the teaching was becoming established as a new form of Western knowledge. The story of the wolf and the travelling priest speaks to the underground spread of Christianity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when disparate Christian communities were linked together by a tenuous web of trade and personal contacts, and when foreign missionaries relied on Chinese converts for funding and protection. The story of the Chinese priest who knelt before the pope with a petition pinned to his hat illustrates the changes that followed the Opium Wars, when the sudden reversal of political and financial power elevated the status of foreign missionaries over that of Chinese priests and Christians. The story of the spirits (Christian souls from Purgatory) who saved the village from the Boxers speaks to the forces that drove Catholic communities to turn inward, and the price they would pay for the visibility of their new social institutions. The story of the priest who cursed the village recounts an actual dispute over a statue, but more deeply illustrates the frustration local Catholics of the early twentieth century felt as they grew ever more financially dependent on the foreign missionaries, who were themselves newly flush with money from the Boxer indemnity. Finally, the story of the flying bicycle speaks not only to the traumas of the Cultural Revolution itself, but also to the deeper problems of separating friends and enemies both during and after the experience of betrayal and recrimination.

The author is of course not the first to use stories as a historical device. Many of the classic works of microhistory, notably Carlo Ginzburg's 1976 classic *The Cheese and the Worms*, rely on narratives to reach popular consciousness. Within Chinese history, Philip Kuhn's *Soulstealers* and Paul Cohen's *History in Three Keys* each use stories to very different effect. Kuhn used rumors of dark sorcery to trace the flow of information through the Qing bureaucracy, while Cohen juxtaposes different accounts of the summer of 1900 as a way of understanding issues of mentality and memory.¹

In contrast, Harrison prefers to allow the actors to speak for themselves. In this, she is remarkably successful. Harrison uses her sources to great effect, painting an extremely vivid picture of a great rainbow of personalities: the dour priest Francesco Fazzini (the one said to have cursed the village on his departure) who barely spoke Chinese and resented his exile to the mountains of Shanxi; saintly Giovacchino Salvetti, who became the standard against which later missionaries were measured; and the outspoken Zhang Fentao, who had been hardened by family tragedy and was executed in prison when she refused to apostatize. These details are not simply stage decoration—they advance the narrative. Thus we see that the ideological conflict between the well-traveled priest Wang Tingrong (he who took to Rome the case for equality between foreign and Chinese priests) and Bishop Gabriele Grioglio was at one level a battle of ideas, one that drew influence from the revolutions of 1848 and anti-clerical movements of southern Italy where Wang had studied for the priesthood. But it was also a very personal conflict between the two men that began from the moment Wang returned to Shanxi and chose to visit his aging parents before going to pay respects to the bishop.

At the same time, it is striking that Harrison never really explains what the stories are meant to accomplish. The introduction suggests that the stories might reflect the community's

¹ Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers As Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

view of itself, but then walks back from this notion by adding that some of the stories are no longer told, or actually come from elsewhere. Moreover, stories like these will have many layers of meaning; at a basic level, they might be either an *account* (literal or symbolic) of events, or a *reaction* to them. While Harrison never claims to interpret the stories, the two poles of her analysis—either to sort out the events behind the story, or to uncover the mentality that produced it—in some ways parallel these two very different interpretations. For example, stories of violence at the hands of Boxers or Communist authorities could be taken as literal, if stylized (by a sense of vindication, or to conform to a biblical narrative of steadfastness in the face of persecution) accounts of events. On the other hand, the story of divine *rescue* is clearly an alternate history, one that more likely reflects a general sense of helplessness than any possible retelling of events. Although it is always difficult to separate out different narrative tropes that drive the recording and remembrance of history, I think that the novelty and the analytical significance of these stories would have been greatly enhanced had the author tried to take on the issues of memory and mentality more overtly, even if only by better positioning herself in the existing literature in the field of Chinese history.

A second problem is how to deal with stories that are in many ways tangential to Cave Gully itself. Again, there is a significant divide between the older and more recent stories, the latter having been culled from the oral histories of villagers. That many of the older stories are more general lore, and thus fairly incidental to Cave Gully itself, is in some cases only announced near the end of the chapter. These deviations not only end some of the chapters on a fairly inconclusive note, they also complicate the claim of this book to be a village history, especially since we cannot know how typical Cave Gully is of the region as a whole. The problem of context applies more generally. In focusing so clearly on the *internal* microhistory of a village, and of one genealogy of Italian missionaries, the book ignores many of the *external* contingencies. For example, apart from a brief mention of Dutch and Belgian Catholics working elsewhere in Shanxi, there is no other discussion of competing missionary endeavors, Catholic or Protestant.

Although I find these omissions disappointing, they are in many ways integral to the goal of the book to present a village-level view of history. One of the most novel and successful features of the book derives from this decision to build a narrative based around the people and events that were meaningful to those who lived them. The great political changes make brief cameo appearances, if at all (thus the Xinhai Revolution is never mentioned, but the First Vatican Council gets three pages). Instead, the book builds its chronology around the major milestones of life in a Catholic village: the arrival or departure of a missionary priest, or construction of a new church, orphanage or vineyard. Occasionally, it does feel that the focus on the Catholic story does exclude a bit too much of everything else, even from a village perspective. Cave Gully's growing reliance on fellow Catholics for education and marriage partners notwithstanding, their non-Catholic neighbors appear here only as adversaries.

The problem of context, and thus of defining what really constitutes a village perspective, is especially important for the question of acculturation. In China as elsewhere, conflict between missionaries and native Christians often turned on the struggle to control tangible assets such as institutions, funds, or positions of authority. Theologically, this struggle played out in battles over orthodox practice, such as the question of whether to accept certain rites. In contrast, the realms

of personal belief and interpretation tended to be more forgiving, and thus less visible to historians. The village perspective allows this book to take these realms seriously, and thus shows not only where conflict did exist, but more importantly where it did not. This perspective allows the book to reverse the prevailing logic that places communities and believers on a linear spectrum between two opposing absolutes of Chinese or Christian authenticity. Even if a variety of outsiders, from Qing officials to missionaries themselves, saw the struggle of Chinese Christianity in such exclusive terms, the villagers of Cave Gully were not necessarily defined by them, and instead negotiated a much more complex landscape of global Catholicism.

I suspect that they also negotiated a parallel landscape of local culture that may have had more influence on their Catholicism than the book lets on. Early chapters discuss the influence of local religion in terms of brief moments of controversy, such as when Catholics were warned not to display ancestral scrolls or visit temple fairs. But such moments might not have been typical. The annual prayer and procession was very much a feature of Catholic Europe, but equally prominent in northern China, where a prayer for rain is one of the key moments of the agricultural year, and a fairly universal expression of village solidarity. Which tradition influenced the procession in Cave Gully more? Moving from practice to belief, the problem of acculturation becomes even murkier. Harrison herself notes that the missionaries themselves generally trusted the faith of the local Christians, but constantly questioned their *understanding*, likening their syllabic recitation of the prayers and litanies to the chattering of parrots. Clearly there was a great deal of transference of existing ideas onto Catholicism in Cave Gully. The white-clad souls who rescued the village from the Boxers sound much more like David Jordan's iconic portrayal of Chinese ancestral spirits than the traditional depiction of souls in Purgatory.² The fact that the departure of the priests in the 1950s was followed so quickly by a spike in charismatic and miraculous occurrences suggests Shanxi Catholics retained a great deal of theological independence, even after three centuries.

This is an intellectually ambitious book, and one that covers a significant amount of territory in a short space. Harrison's ability to integrate village history on its own terms into global themes, and as something other than a passive victim, is genuinely innovative and important. The insights that emerge from this perspective could be equally instructive for understanding the ways in which any external ideology, from religious teachings to political campaigns, takes root in local society. While her choice to distance her own voice from much of the narrative does come at a certain cost, it also what makes the book so unique.

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² David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

MURTHY, VIREN. *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness*. Leiden: Brill, 2011. viii, 268 pp. \$148 (cloth)

Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (or Zhang Binglin 章炳麟) (1869–1936) is known as one of the important revolutionaries of early twentieth-century China. Anti-Manchu, a scholar of “national learning,” and a critic of Western influence, Zhang cannot easily be categorized as either conservative, reformer, or revolutionary. Viren Murthy’s study shows the intricacies and evolution of Zhang’s thought, with a focus on his Buddhist inspiration, more specifically the Yogācārā (Consciousness-only) school. He starts out from Zhang’s personal experience of maltreatment and torture, when he was put in jail (1903–06) after being accused of plotting against the Qing regime. Zhang spent the following years in Japan (1906–10), where he was influenced by Japanese thinkers and German idealism. Out of intellectual debates with reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, Murthy unravels Zhang’s own “unique philosophy of negation” (p. 5) as a criticism of Western categories and institutions, and more particularly of global capitalist modernity. On an even broader scope, Murthy’s study also offers an entrance into tensions between old and new, nationalism and universalism, tradition and global modernity.

The first chapter, which also functions as introduction to the intellectual scene, immediately throws the reader into a rather dense debate on modernity, capitalism, and Zhang Taiyan. Drawing on Japanese, Western, and Chinese scholarship, Murthy argues that the contrast between Zhang’s anti-Manchu nationalism and his Buddhist self-negation was conditioned by global capitalist modernity. He heavily draws on the ideas of the contemporary public intellectual Wang Hui, with whom Murthy worked in Beijing, but also on other scholars such as Takeuchi Yoshimi, Chang Hao, Alex Schneider, and Georg Lukás. The second chapter analyzes shifts in Zhang’s views, moving away from Kang Youwei’s reformist ideal of a multiracial nation-state toward an anti-Manchu Han nationalism considered modern as well as rooted in the past.

The following chapters all concern the integration of Buddhism into Zhang Taiyan’s thought. Chapter 3 shows how Zhang differed from Liang Qichao in using Yogācārā Buddhism to counter capitalist modernity and entities entailed by it such as science, universal laws and ethical principles, nation-building, and imperialism. Buddhist insights combined with the Daoist idea of confusion (*huo*) helped to deconstruct the notion of the subject and to create a provisional subject willing to sacrifice itself in a revolutionary context. In Chapter 4, Murthy argues that Zhang negated the ideas of (Hegelian) evolution and historical progress, and that he saw the world as constituted of appearances caused by fluctuations of consciousness resulting from “karmic seeds.” Convinced of the world’s illusory nature, Zhang cherished self-negation and the end of history. The fifth and last chapter shows how Zhang warned his contemporaries against the oppressive nature of such notions as “rationality,” “equality,” and “universal principle” as means to control man and dominate the world. Using Buddhism and inspired by Zhuangzi’s idea of “equalization” (*qi*), Zhang rejected the homogenizing influence of global capitalism in favor of an embrace of particularities and a detachment from words.

The conclusion argues that Zhang Taiyan’s critical stance against the homogenizing power of capitalist modernity, its evolutionary visions, and its abstract principles is still relevant today. As Murthy notes, “Zhang’s work is especially significant in Chinese intellectual history since it is one of the first attempts to overcome the alienation caused by capitalism in thought by

invoking Buddhist categories” (p. 242). Murthy tries to show how Zhang’s legacy has been critically adopted by his student and cultural critic Lu Xun and by Murthy’s own teacher, the “new leftist” Wang Hui. Murthy’s book can probably be situated in this line of intellectual heritage. Readers less acquainted with the topic will probably have a hard time following the intricacies of Murthy’s arguments. Murthy’s work reads as a sophisticated reflection for insiders.

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PAULÈS, XAVIER. *Histoire d’une drogue en sursis. L’opium à Canton, 1906–1936*. édition EHESS, 2010. 334 pp. € 24.40 (paper).

For a number of years, scholars of modern China have taken it as a given that opium, its consumption, and importance as a source of revenue were among the many contradictions in Republican China; a modernizing regime relied on opium revenues and therefore turned a blind eye to its sale and consumption. The morality tale of opium addiction, causing the fall of family and national fortunes, was a trope employed in literature, anti-opium propaganda, and film, although most commonly used in film after 1949. This year stands as the dividing line between a China in decay and a China reborn, and the suppression of opium, itself the ultimate symbol of China’s 19th-century fall from the ranks of powerful states, was another Chinese Communist success story.

Over the last 20 years, scholars have begun to move beyond these stereotypes and have researched opium use, its regulation, political and financial importance, and the suppression campaigns, both in the context of Chinese history and an international history of drug use. Revisionist historians have questioned the narrative of mass addiction in southern China, while others have now begun to explore the importance of opium to the occupation regimes in China proper and Manchuria. In these histories, Japan replaces the West as the imperial power, using opium to literally calm and control the Chinese.

What has been missing is a detailed study of every facet of opium production, sale, use (both as narcotic and its place in social life), regulation, and suppression in one geographical place. Xavier Paulès has written a microhistory of opium, focusing on the city of Canton. His monograph, based on his 2005 dissertation, is a detailed examination of all of the above, including an analysis of anti-opium propaganda, opium production, and suppression in the context of warlord politics, the social meanings and use of opium, and opium use within the context of Canton’s geo-history from 1906 to 1936. He draws on diplomatic sources in many languages, Canton police records, mass media, memoirs, and political documents to give us the most complete picture of the many sides and contradictions of the drug. In the process, he opens a very interesting discussion on the social meanings of opium use and its transformation as a signifier for the poor, the sick, the addicted, the unfilial, and the unpatriotic. It is an ambitious goal, and one which is largely very successful. The one criticism would be that the monograph covers so much—the political, social, economic, ideological—that the reader may be frequently turning to Google to keep track. (New Guangxi Clique, Old Guangxi Clique—which warlord at

which time?) Thankfully, Paulès provides maps, reproductions of the images he analyzes, and short biographies of the principal actors.

Each chapter concentrates on one or more specific themes. Chapter 1 examines the structural and material back history of Canton's opium trade, including the origins of its opium and effects on the user. This chapter focuses on what Paulès calls the politics of opium, a concept that includes the public and administrative debate over the regulation or eradication of opium and the place of opium in warlord finances. Paulès argues that those who wanted to manage or eradicate opium were caught in a contradiction. From 1906 to 1913, the Qing's successful eradication campaign created the template which the new Republic wished to emulate, and no political figures could ignore. Militarized politics and competition over what form the new republic would take (federalist, centralist) made continuing slow eradication impossible; opium revenues were too essential to the warlords struggling to shape the city, province, and state. This has been studied before, but Paulès explores the complexities. Endorsing opium was political suicide, so Canton's leaders, while enjoying opium revenues, continued to endorse the discourse of control and eventual eradication. Paulès concludes that neither eradication nor open endorsement was possible.

Some of the most insightful evidence on the evolution of both drug use and the perception of that use, an evolution that led to opium's decline, are found in the later chapters. In a section entitled "the geography of consumption," Paulès shows that a desire to keep opium dens to the margins, still within the modern city boundaries but outside what most Cantonese considered the "real" boundaries—the old city wall—marginalized opium use. This also geographically reproduced public opinion—opium use had to remain on the periphery. Paulès forces the reader to reconsider the centrality of opium to our understanding of daily life in China, for example when he compares the number of French bars/cafes and Cantonese opium dens to their respective populations (1 to 100 in France, 1 to 1110 in Canton). His fifth chapter, on the dens' operations, examines their regulation, taxation, and management, even the furnishings and the hierarchy of opium dens and their patrons—the lowest selling the cheapest opium, to middle-range dens, and those for the elite. Embedded in this chapter is the discrepancy between a discourse of violence in the dens and an absence of that violence in the police records. His description of a typical smoker, a fictional Mr. Chen, reinforces his argument that these dens performed social functions as places where customers could meet, interact, and demonstrate their skills and status. Paulès shows that it is the performative, social, and above all voluntary nature of opium use that contradicts our understanding of deadly addiction. The opium den seems much more like a local bar.

Chapters 6 and 7, on anti-opium propaganda, identify the typical opium smoker. Anti-opium propaganda rested on repeated themes and images—the descent into hell, the ruined family, the poor, the bad Chinese citizen, the emaciated smoker—all created the now stereotypical addict. This negative imagery stigmatized opium use, and Paulès argues it led to a decline in use among the young, the better off, and the patriotic. Opium smoking became associated not with social users who could use or pass on opium, but with personal, familial, and national degradation. Using 1936 detoxification statistics, Paulès shows in Chapter 7 that most smokers were males between the ages of 25 and 45 who smoked for leisure or pleasure. Of those who smoked, the greatest number were workers, rickshaw drivers, opera singers, and soldiers.

Paulès stresses this gap between image and reality and demonstrates that opium consumption and its marginalization were underway well before 1936, transforming from elite habit to national shame as the practice and meaning of opium smoking itself changed. Opium use was marginalized, at least in Canton's case, both socially and geographically before 1949. Overall, Paulès' monograph is the most comprehensive study we have of opium's use and meaning in a single place. It challenges our conceptual and historiographical stereotypes.

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SHAH, ANGILEE AND JEFFREY WASSERSTROM, EDS. *Chinese Characters: Profiles of Fast-Changing Lives in a Fast-Changing Land*. Foreword by Pankaj Mishra. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. 244 pp. \$24.95 (paper).

This volume collects fifteen essays on contemporary Chinese society written by journalists and scholars well-known in their respective fields. As indicated by the subtitle, the main motif is change. China, we are told, is changing, and changing so fast that its people struggle to keep up. Lives are unceasingly transformed by powerful forces; identities are taken on only to be shed and replaced. This heady brew of individual repositioning and risk-taking has, in turn, produced a nation that is remarkably diverse. Society is flourishing; the state, retreating. Accordingly, each of the essays describes a China in which individual decisions about belief, style, and self-expression are of central importance to understanding contemporary and future realities.

So what have ordinary citizens of the People's Republic of China—the “characters” referenced by the title's only mildly distracting pun—chosen to make of their newfound freedoms? In the first section of essays, “Doubters and Believers,” we learn that they have become Daoists, neoconservatives, and impetuous young dreamers. In the next section, “Past and Present,” the reader encounters impoverished urbanites, casualties of the Cultural Revolution, and transnational Buddhist communities torn by Cold War divides. “Hustlers and Entrepreneurs” introduces rural migrants, aspiring automobile industry change agents, and artists and online gamers for hire. “Rebels and Reformers” focuses on a charismatic Uyghur educator, an independent geologist, and a law professor. “Teachers and Pupils” gives us expatriate school children, an ambivalent Young Pioneer and her parents, and two passionate guitarists. Each essay combines interviewing with more general background that connects individual narratives to larger trends. Taken as a whole, these fifteen stories offer confirmation that China is changing, and that differences within China are multiplying. When compared with conventional scholarly understandings of the Mao years, they suggest that Chinese society is now a society of *more*: more belief systems, more economic opportunities, more inequalities, more complexity, more aspiration, and more uncertainty.

Of course, much the same could be said of post-Cold War societies generally, which is not to argue that past decades were so unlike the present, but rather that it has become accepted to see them this way. China is still a *de facto* single-party state. Its economy is still state-

dominated. Its society is still roiled by periodic ideological and anti-corruption campaigns, and political dissidents are arrested (though in fewer numbers) and their families harassed. Surveillance and information controls are pervasive, and may be tightening further. Ethnic inequalities define state policy and security concerns along the western frontier. Political patronage and social advancement remain profoundly intertwined. To what extent, asks the skeptic, does the end of the Mao Zedong era really mark a historical dividing line? In the volume's brief afterword, it is suggested that China's twenty-first century present resembles the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution (as if industrialization were not one of the main stories of the Mao years) but such juxtapositions, while certainly intriguing, are not sustained by evidence or analysis. A more convincing case could be made that new technologies and U.S.-driven globalization, as well as anti-U.S. nationalism, are among the more notable changes reshaping social relations in China today. Indeed, these are the themes which emerge from several of the more perceptive essays, and they provide a compelling, even original, supplement to the volume's main thesis that post-Mao China can be easily distinguished from its Maoist predecessor by virtue of a bigger GDP and kinder, gentler Communist Party.

Another major change, noted by Pankaj Mishra in the volume's provocative foreword, is simply that journalists and scholars have more access to China than at any other time in the PRC's history. By collecting contributions from multiple luminaries of the broader China-watching community, and pairing these with well-honed pieces written by scholars and insightful freelancers, *Chinese Characters* is a worthwhile read based on the quality of the individual essays alone. Yet taken as a whole, the volume does have its flaws. For those who closely follow the world of non-academic China writing, at least a few of the stories will already be familiar, bordering on rote. (Five essays have been published elsewhere and, of these, four first appeared in 2008–2009.) Another drawback, particularly for non-specialist readers, is the introduction's lack of adequate contextual information concerning notable figures, events, and trends after 2002.

Finally, there is the head-scratching, if predictable, decision to argue for the volume's importance by favorably contrasting its fine-grained narratives and modest lack of an overarching argument to the "low aims" of the "mainstream press"; flawed "Western tales" explaining China's track record of post-Mao economic growth and human rights abuses; and the foolish efforts of "prognosticators who speculate about what lies ahead." Head-scratching, because several volume contributors are themselves mainstream press journalists, critics of China's Maoist legacies, and commentators on future trends. Predictable, because the move reflects a familiar and recurrent attitude in Sinological circles, Western and otherwise—disdain for the knowledge of non-specialist outsiders, coupled with belief that Chinese society exists on a kind of special, *sui generis* plane of human reality. Mishra, whose numerous publications include a magnificent global history of pan-Asianism, straightforwardly uses the adjective "inscrutable." But knowing is an epistemological problem, and to be fair the essays here are not particularly philosophical. Instead, a more realistic appraisal of the volume's merits would note that it provides an excellent snapshot of accessible, English-language China writing in the waning years of the Era of Hu Jintao.

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